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SUBJECT: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN MOSCOW, PART TWO

Classified By: Political M/C Alice Wells. Reasons: 1.4(B/D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. This is part two of a two-part series on the typical experiences of immigrants in Moscow. The first cable described the experiences of a partly disabled Chechen male who has lived on and off in Moscow for the past 20 years. The current cable relates the experiences of a Kazakh female who is a newcomer to Moscow. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The subject of this cable, Dinara, is a highly educated Muskie alumnus from Kazakhstan. She moved to Moscow with her 11-year-old son in the fall of 2005 to be closer to her mother and brother and his family, all of whom are Kazakhs who have held Russian citizenship for many years.

Registration Hassles

¶3. (C) When Dinara moved to Moscow, she traveled by train, as many Kazakhs and other Central Asians do to save money. She explained that to stay in Moscow legally, a Kazakh citizen has to receive temporary registration within five days after crossing the Russian border. Traveling by train takes almost two days, so by the time she got to Moscow, only three days remained for her to get registered. In those three days, she had to have her application approved by her landlord, by the building administration, and by a district police officer, and then submitted -- together with a copy of her passport page, a receipt confirming she had paid the fee, and her Migrant Card (MC), which she received when she crossed the border -- to the district branch of the Federal Migration Service (FMS). Each of the three offices -- building administration, police station, and FMS -- have different working hours, are not located near each other, and usually have very long lines. She said even if a person didn't have any other commitments their first few days in Moscow and knew exactly which papers are required and where all the offices are located, being able to make the deadline would be quite a challenge. She joked that if she had known all this before she arrived in Moscow, she would have taken a plane.

¶4. (C) The registration itself is a stamp that an FMS officer puts on the MC. However, it is not done on the spot, but takes three working days (i.e., another week since the FMS is only open three days per week) to get the MC back. Even then, it might take one or two more days because the lines are so long that the FMS sometimes closes before a person can reach the head of the line. People usually begin queuing two to three hours before the office opens. The temporary registration is only good for 90 calendar days. After that, one has to leave and re-enter the country in order to receive a new MC and start the registration process all over again. There is a website forum (www.nelegalov.net) where people discuss the closest and most convenient places to cross the border, as well as many other immigration issues.

¶5. (C) Dinara's temporary registration expired before she had the chance to cross the border to get a new one. If you are caught leaving the country with an expired temporary registration, the consequences can be harsh: either a large ruble fine or a several-year ban from re-entering Russia. However, most border guards do not levy the fine, but pocket a bribe instead. Dinara tucked 1500 rubles into her passport in case the border guards stopped her. Luckily, they did not. Dinara thought Uzbeks and Tajiks are singled out for closer scrutiny than Kazakhs. Her current temporary registration expires on November 5, and she is in the process of figuring out when and where to go to renew it. For many blue-collar immigrants, repeating this procedure every three months is prohibitively expensive and the time away from work required could cost them their jobs, so they let the registration expire and take their chances with the police.

"Simplified" Citizenship Procedures

¶6. (C) Since Dinara came to Russia intending to settle permanently, instead of seeking temporary residency and work permits, she decided to immediately apply for citizenship. Kazakhstanis, as former citizens of the Soviet Union, are permitted to apply for citizenship under a "simplified" procedure. She said that, in theory, it does sound simple: one needs to submit an MC with a valid registration stamp, proof of registration with the Kazakh Consulate in Moscow, a birth certificate, and several other documents, and then wait for up to three months until the application is considered and a decision is made. Ideally, citizenship could be awarded within the 90-day temporary registration period, without having to worry about leaving the country to get a new MC and re-register. However, the reality, she said, is

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quite different.

¶7. (C) The first real challenge was that a complete list of documents required for the citizen application package is only obtainable from an authorized officer at the local FMS office. In Dinara's local FMS branch, there was only one such officer, and that officer had left for a month-long vacation shortly before Dinara tried to apply. Dinara said she argued fiercely with the deputy chief of the FMS office and, in the end, was able to briefly meet with the officer in the middle of her vacation to obtain the list of documents. (Dinara said that most immigrants would not dare stand up to the bureaucracy like that for fear of repercussions.) Dinara spent the rest of the officer's vacation preparing the documents for submission on the only weekday (Tuesday) that they were accepted. After waiting in line until 6 p.m., she submitted her documents, but was told she would have to wait six months, even though the law explicitly states "no longer than three months." However, she was happy just to have completed the process and decided not to object. As a sidenote, she mentioned that by the end of the day, a few of the FMS officials were clearly inebriated and noticeably more friendly and helpful.

Discrimination In Society

¶8. (C) Dinara's impression is that men get stopped more frequently than women (she has only been stopped once), especially those who look like construction workers. She said her brother hasn't been stopped by the police in several years, but that is because he has his own car and rarely uses the metro. Even if he used the metro regularly, she said he wouldn't be stopped because the police don't often stop people who are dressed professionally. Uzbek workers renovating her apartment told her that it usually cost them 100 or 200 rubles to bribe a policeman. However, once, one of them was carrying several thousand rubles and the police

noticed. They demanded 2000 rubles from him and when he refused they detained him, did not allow him to make any phone calls, and only released him six or seven hours later when he gave up and handed over the money.

¶9. (C) Dinara maintained that the law governing immigration violations was written in such a way that it almost encourages bribery: the police cannot fine either Russian citizens or foreigners for registration and immigration status violations, but they can stop anyone and detain them for up to 48 hours solely on suspicion of commission of a crime or an immigration violation. This is why most illegals willingly pay a bribe on the spot. Otherwise, they would be placed in detention and have to pay the bribe in any case.

¶10. (C) Dinara said that her son has not faced any discrimination in school from teachers or other students. She ascribes that partly to the fact that he looks more Russian than Kazakh (his father is Russian). However, the administrators were reluctant to enroll him at his first school, saying he would lag behind because of the "differences in curriculum between Russia and Kazakhstan." She said their attitude was condescending and borderline prejudiced, so she enrolled him in a school farther away from their apartment, but with a much warmer and welcoming administration.

¶11. (C) COMMENT. An August 2006 poll by the Levada Center found that 17% thought the idea of "Russia for Russians" should have been implemented long ago, while another 37% supported that idea "within sensible limits." Just 28% rejected the idea, branding it as "fascism." Dinara worries about the future for her son when she sees these kind of polls, and is not overly optimistic that problems will be resolved in the near or medium term. While her case is less dramatic than Adam's, it nevertheless highlights the widespread corruption and discrimination immigrants face when they come to Russia.

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